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SUBJECT: ZAGREB WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT- SEPTEMBER 25, 2009

¶1. (U) AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH CARDINAL BOZANIC, PRAISES PLANNED JASENOVAC VISIT: Among his introductory calls with local leaders, Ambassador Foley met on September 21 with the head of the Catholic Church in Croatia, Cardinal Josip Bozanic. The Cardinal and Ambassador discussed the important role both the U.S. and the Church play in helping Croatia on its path towards EU accession, fighting the challenges of corruption in society, and easing the burden of economic hardship in Croatia. The Ambassador also praised the Cardinal for his planned September 24 visit to Jasenovac, the site of the largest concentration camp in Croatia during WWII. Bozanic is the highest ranking church official to ever visit Jasenovac and his trip is seen as an important step towards reconciliation. (JNCALLAHAN)

¶2. (U) OPPOSITION CANDIDATE JOSIPOVIC AHEAD IN PRESIDENTIAL RACE, BUT BY HOW MUCH?: Recent polling is consistent on two points. The Social Democratic Party candidate, Ivo Josipovic, is in the lead. And second place is closely contested between President of the Croatian Chamber of Commerce, Nada Vidosevic, who is running as an independent, and the Mayor of Zagreb, Milan Bandic, who has yet to announce if he really intends to enter the race. The most recent poll by PULS, Croatia's most respected polling agency, indicates that Josipovic would gain about 30% of the votes in the first round, while other polls have him leading but only with about 22% of the vote. In most polls, Vidosevic and Bandic both come in between 14-15% of the vote. Vesna Pusic, candidate of the Croatian People's Party and the most prominent female candidate, is in third place in most polls with about 10% of the vote. The candidate of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union, Andrija Hebrang, is polling between 7-8%. (DMEGES)

¶3. (U) AMBASSADOR VISITS SPLIT AND MEETS WITH SACEUR, MAYOR, AND COUNTY PREFECT: Ambassador Foley travelled on September 22-23 to Croatia's second largest city, Split, for meetings with the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Admiral James Stavridis. Adm. Stavridis, together with Amb. Foley, had the opportunity to observe a portion of the three-week long special forces training exercise Jackal Stone. The Ambassador also met with Split-Dalmatia County Prefect Ante Sanader and Split Mayor Zeljko Kerum, where they primarily discussed prospects for promoting economic ties between Croatia and America. Finally, the Ambassador visited one of Croatia's major shipbuilders, Brodosplit, and expressed support for Croatia's ongoing efforts to privatize its shipyards and increase their commercial competitiveness. (DMEGES)

¶4. (U) PRESIDENT MESIC VISITS CUBA: President Mesic travelled to Cuba on September 17, prior to attending the UN General Assembly in New York. Mesic met with Cuban President Raul Castro, the head of the one-party parliament, the Minister for Science, and visited the Latin American School of Medicine. During his visit Mesic promoted greater Cuban-Croatian economic ties, but his hosts gave greater play

to his oblique criticism of U.S. economic sanctions against the island. This is Mesic's second visit to Cuba, the first having taken place in 2006 when he represented Croatia as an observer country at a meeting of the non-aligned movement. (JNCALLAHAN)

15. (U) TAFT GRANTS TOTALING 20,000 DOLLARS AWARDED FOR REFUGEE PROGRAMS: Two local NGOs implementing programs to assist in the return and reintegration of refugees to Croatia signed grants on September 22 from the Taft Fund, a grants program managed by the Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. The NGO "Our Life" currently provides needed medical and social assistance to approximately 200 elderly and/or infirm refugee returnee beneficiaries living in remote areas of the country heavily affected by the war. "Our Life" was awarded 10,000 USD to purchase a new vehicle. The NGO "Serb Democratic Forum" was awarded 10,000 USD to support its free legal aid program for refugees/returnees born in other parts of the former Yugoslavia attempting to gain citizenship in Croatia. The money will pay for cumbersome administrative and document fees that have obstructed the successful return and reintegration of a number of refugees. (JNCALLAHAN)
FOLEY